

## **Deviations and Thresholds: teaching as a field of experimentation for other practices of urbanism**

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### **Abstract**

Nonostante le numerose critiche verso il funzionalismo e razionalismo esacerbanti l'urbanistica moderna, le basi metodologiche su cui si è consolidato il campo disciplinare degli studi urbani non sono ancora state completamente affrontate e messe in discussione. Il contesto brasiliano mostra come, nella maggior parte dei corsi di laurea di architettura e urbanistica, queste basi - ereditate dal XIX secolo - sono tutt'oggi operanti e non si sono sufficientemente problematizzate. La spinta più purista, positivista, funzionalista e teleologica che segue una certa idea di progresso tecnico è ineludibile, inasprisce il concetto di pianificazione ed è diventata egemone nel campo della pianificazione urbana. Accanto a questo orientamento, un'altra linea di pensiero, anch'essa moderna, critica gli eccessi del funzionalismo e le semplificazioni concettuali interne all'urbanistica, una disciplina scientifica che ha cercato soprattutto di controllare, ordinare e limitare la complessità dell'esperienza urbana. La nostra proposta è quella di recuperare questo dibattito critico per ripensarne la pratica e, soprattutto, l'insegnamento dell'urbanistica come un campo ampio di sperimentazione, fondato su una serie di indagini dagli approcci metodologici meno positivisti, semplificativi o omogenizzanti e che cercano di capire la varietà, eterogeneità e complessità delle città contemporanee. Si tratta di una proposta che mette al centro l'insegnamento (e la pratica professionale) dell'urbanistica, il suo rapporto con chi vive la città, le loro esperienze, gli incontri con altre razionalità e norme in relazione a modelli egemonici, a dinamiche di auto-produzione e auto-gestione e, soprattutto, le novità e le criticità che apportano.

Despite the countless criticisms of the exaggerated functionalism and rationalism of modern urbanism, the modern methodological foundations on which the disciplinary field of urbanism has been consolidated have not yet been fully questioned. In fact, in most undergraduate courses in architecture and urbanism in Brazil, these bases, inherited from the 19th century, remain operative and still do not seem to have been sufficiently problematized. That modern orientation, more purist, that follows a certain idea of technical, ineluctable progress, which exacerbated the notions of order and control, became hegemonic in the field of urbanism. However, another modern line also criticizes the excesses of functionalism, and its simplifications, in urbanism itself as a scientific discipline that sought to control order and thus limit the complexity of the urban experience. Our proposal is to return to these pertinent criticisms in order to think of urbanism and, above all, its teaching as an expanded field of experimentation, which is based on a series of other less positivistic, simplifying or homogenizing methodological experiences. This paper argues that it is by tackling urbanism in this way that greater insights into the multiplicity, heterogeneity and complexity of contemporary cities can be gained. It is a proposition that puts at the center of the teaching (and professional practice) of urbanism the relationship with the practitioners of

the city, their experiences, the other rationalities and norms in relation to the hegemonic models, the dynamics of self-production and self-management, and, first and foremost, the disputes they prompts.

**Parole chiave:** Urbanistica, Insegnamento, Sperimentazione

**Keywords:** Urbanism, Teaching, Experimentation

### Other moderns

Despite the countless criticisms of the exaggerated functionalism and rationalism of modern urbanism - and its main “manual”, the so-called “Athens Charter” or the construction of the modern city *par excellence*, Brasília - criticisms that became more current from the 1960s, with the end of the CIAMs (International Congresses of Modern Architecture)<sup>1</sup>, the main methodological bases on which the disciplinary field of urbanism was consolidated have not yet been fully questioned. Indeed, in most undergraduate courses in architecture and urbanism in Brazil, they remain operative, even in proposals that seek to deal with issues considered critical to modernist functionalist urbanism. These include how best to tackle history and memory, the vernacular and the popular, or even the extent to which the population should be involved. Moreover, the methodological questions of our disciplinary field, inherited from the 19th century<sup>2</sup>, still do not seem to have been sufficiently problematized. This is as true for today’s so-called corporate urbanism, which is hegemonic all over the world, and geared to the interests of the market (new urbanism, strategic planning, for some), as it is for the necessary critical and militant counterpoint to it, namely seeking to meet the interests of the inhabitants, which could be called collaborative urbanism (participatory urbanism, self-management, community, etc.).

1 On the history of the CIAMs and their criticism, particularly the situationist, see, among others, the presentation of the *“Apologia da Deriva”*, organized by one of the authors (Jacques, 2003), or Barone (2002), on the critical perspectives of Team X.

2 Since the emergence of urbanism as a theoretical and practical discipline in the 19th century, this disciplinary field is related both to different processes of hygiene, order and control, which are sometimes very authoritarian, of intervention in the existing ancient cities, and, starting in the 20th century, various zoning and separation plans of the new modern cities. In this first century of its existence, the discipline has been dedicated, predominantly, to seeking the antithesis of urban “disorder”, namely “the order” as Françoise Choay showed in the 1965 classic, *“L’Urbanisme, utopies et réalités”*.

The following question still hangs in the air: if the disciplinary field that has already sprung up is thoroughly modern, could there be a “non-modern” urbanism, especially after the end of the modern movement in architecture and urbanism (that of the CIAMs)? Moreover, this question emerges in the most radical criticisms of modern functionalist urbanism, for example those made precisely by those who decreed its end, as Team X (which even held a very amusing symbolic burial of the CIAM), or even by the situationists, who used the idea of detour and *dérive* as critical tools<sup>3</sup>. In the disciplinary field of urbanism (but also in that of architecture, which is still clearly modern in its more functionalist and formalist sense), especially in its practical exercise, but also in how it is taught in universities, modern methodologies linked to an idea of technical progress have been naturalized. In addition, some terms have been inherited, e.g., from the old hygienist discourses with their medical metaphors, such as the famous “diagnosis”. These continue to be used even by those most critical of the renewed hygienist processes of social cleansing that are linked to processes for spectacularizing and gentrifying contemporary cities.

We suggest starting by deviating from this question of there being a “non-modern urbanism” to another: the one that refers to what modern heritage or modern tradition the field of urbanism is said to be still demanding. Without a doubt, the disciplinary field of urbanism largely kept in step with the more purist, positivist, functionalist, teleological, modern trend that follows a certain idea of a technical and ineluctable progress. This exacerbated the notions of order and control, which are central at the moment that urbanism emerges as a scientific discipline of practical intervention. However, another modern aspect, especially in the inter-war years, already criticized this notion of progress, which was thought as an uncritical technical development. For example, this was done brilliantly by Walter Benjamin, one of the leading thinkers of this other modern, critical tradition, in his theses on history<sup>4</sup>. The criticisms of the excesses of functionalism, of its simplifications, and of urbanism itself as a discipline that sought above all to control, order, and which thus also limit the complexity of the urban experience were already present at the very peak

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<sup>3</sup> See, in this regard, the aforementioned collection of texts of the situationists organized by one of the authors, Jacques (2003).

<sup>4</sup> See: Benjamin (1985).

of modernity (and even internally within the academic discipline itself, which was then under construction). These criticisms amounted therefore to a critical modern detour from the idea of progress.

Our proposal is precisely to return to these pertinent criticisms, in particular at the very moment when they were violently interrupted (mainly by fascism and Nazism in Europe), in order to rethink our disciplinary field. For this, we need to think of urbanism as an expanded or widened field (as Rosalind Krauss proposed for sculpture<sup>5</sup>). This thinking is based on other less positivistic, simplifying or homogenizing methodological experiences that can encompass the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and complexity of contemporary cities. Most of the methodologies still used today, in particular those of urban apprehension, are no longer able (or perhaps never have done, or even attempted) to do so.

Patrick Geddes - a biologist, a botanist, a Scot, who was close to Darwin and Kropotkin and known as one of the inventors of sociology ("*civics*"), was also a geographer and an anarchist - was a generalist, and is regarded as one of the founding "fathers" of urbanism<sup>6</sup> as a "science of the cities". He played an active role in consolidating this discipline at the start of the 20th century. It is important to retrieve his proposition of an interesting distinction between heredity and heritage: heredity concerns finding when our ancestors determine us, and heritage is what we use when we choose our ancestors<sup>7</sup>.

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5 See: Krauss (1984).

6 The term already used at that time was urbanization, in Romance languages it was mainly urbanisme, e.g. urbanismo in Portuguese, and in the Anglo-Saxon world the term most used was urban planning. In several countries, including Brazil, urban planning began to form a field of knowledge of its own which was independent and interdisciplinary. It works with the regional scale (while urbanism in certain cases, as in Brazil, in line with the "doctrine" of the CIAMs, in practice, became a question of scale and a monopoly of architects).

7 It is interesting to note how Patrick Geddes was important at the start of the 20th century which was when this academic discipline was constituted and consolidated. He was a strong supporter of attentive observation of the existing cities. This was called a "survey", which some authors erroneously translated as "diagnosis". Geddes' ideas resurface in the 1950s - including the republishing and translation of his books - at the initial moment of criticism of the excesses of modern functionalism. This was especially made by a group of modern-day architects of the new generation, Team X, particularly by the English married couple, the Smithsons. Already in the 1960s, this was taken up by the so-called participationist architects, such as John Turne, another Briton. In Brazil, his ideas resonate with Carlos Nelson Ferreira dos Santos,

At least since the introduction of the “urban survey” - based on observing what cities underwent the first most violent processes of modernization - created by Geddes in the early 20th century, urbanism has operated by using montages to carry out its urban analyses. Geddes used to travel to get to know cities. For example, he undertook urban surveys that also tackled ethnographic research, particularly in his long journey through India. Starting with him, surveys (or analysis of the urban pre-existences) began to be conducted before the urban plans and projects. This is why he proclaimed: «Survey before the plan!». In addition to city shows (exhibitions), Geddes created the “Outlook Tower” (a kind of “observatory” of the city) in Edinburgh; he mounted several exhibitions; and also published books, such as the famous *Cities in evolution*, published in 1915. Geddes proposed a «synoptic concept of study» of cities by «seeking to recognize and use all points of view - scientific, artistic, historical - and from these to interpret the course of future development of the city and its possibilities».

Especially in his proposal for a traveling exhibition on cities, which included a series of boards to which new images were added, for each new city visited, to the montages (which were lost in the Emden shipwreck during World War I), the type of montage that Geddes used to apprehend and understand cities was always a heterogeneous and heterodox mixture not only of different disciplinary fields but also of different temporalities and narrative forms. Modern urbanism, starting with the CIAMs (in particular CIAM IV, 1933), made the montages, as a form of apprehending cities, more and more uniform (the famous modern “grille” proposed by Le Corbusier to be “applied” in all cities). Thus they became, especially in the more specialized and functionalist practice of urbanism, a type of montage by similarities, which seeks any unity or totality whatsoever, or even a way of legitimizing dominant narratives already given. In effect, he created a standardized, homogenizing type of montage and transformed it into a model to be followed for any city, of any culture. In other

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who was known for his urbanization, with popular participation, of the Brás de Pina favela - which resisted expulsion in the midst of the military dictatorship. Interest in Geddes’ ideas seems to re-emerge also today, judging by the recent publication of an issue of the French magazine *Espace et Sociétés* (167, n 4/2016), entirely dedicated to Patrick Geddes, under the title of *Patrick Geddes en heritage* (Biase et al, 2016), from which Geddes’ notions of inheritance and heredity have spread out, as pointed out in this paper.

words, he prioritizes montage simply as a “formal procedure” to the detriment of montage as a “method of knowledge.” Montage by differences differs from the Corbusian montage because it is a method of knowledge, a method of creation, of problematizing questions that emerge during the process itself, i.e., it is not only an exhibition or illustration of ideas already given. It was practiced in the interwar period by some modern avant-garde intellectuals (especially by the surrealists) and in particular by a constellation of artists, writers or theoreticians in the 1920s and 1930s<sup>8</sup>. These included Sergei Eisenstein, Bertold Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Georges Bataille and Aby Warburg - and more recently, Georges Didi-Huberman, an art historian and professor of visual anthropology at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS) in Paris. Didi-Huberman updates the question of modern editing, in particular in its form of an atlas of images (which started with Warburg), in several of his lectures, lectures and publications, but also in his practice as a curator of exhibitions<sup>9</sup>. The resumption of montage as a form of knowledge vis-à-vis the complexity of contemporary cities is something that we have been exploring theoretically and methodologically in recent years, among other forms of knowledge and critical propositions about the city, in particular in the teaching of urbanism, as we shall see later.

### **Thresholds: the complexity of contemporary cities**

In approaching the teaching of urbanism, it seems to us crucial to have, as a reflexive horizon, some questions that, to a certain extent, prompted its emergence as a science and which today seem to us so distant (considered as a ‘thing of social scientists’): what is “the city”? What is it made of, by whom and for whom, and, especially, how is it done or how does one stop doing it? In fact, perhaps one of the most perennial dimensions inherited (in

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8 «Montage was to be a method of knowledge and a formal procedure born of war, capable of apprehending the ‘disorder of the world’. It would mark our perception of time since the first conflicts of the 20th century: it was to have become the modern method par excellence» (Didi-Huberman, 2007, our translation).

9 Didi Huberman was the curator of a large exhibition entitled “ATLAS How to carry the world on your back?” at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid in 2010, which circulated in Germany and then was split into a series of smaller exhibitions with photographer Arno Gisinger which then circulated in France and also in Brazil.

the sense of heredity imposed and not as a choice) of the modern tradition that has become hegemonic has been the totalizing perspective of “city” that still informs a good part of the teaching and practice of urbanism. The contemporary re-editing of the city’s approaches as a ‘problem’, as ‘crisis’, as ‘chaos’ refers to such an essentialist approach, in which the concept presents itself as universal, naturalized, and everything that escapes being encompassed by it is configured in its reversal or its denial<sup>10</sup>.

Complementarily, there is also the perennially of what Lepetit (2001) called a “functionalist paradigm” that spread throughout the world and which is still said to be present in current studies and interventions on “the city”. This establishes a unilateral relationship, a direct correspondence between the social space and the material organization of the city: «strong determinism [which] asserts the coincidence between the organization of an urban territory and the characteristics of the society that inhabits it». Such a “legacy” necessarily refers us to the question of the disciplining of the “lower classes” for which the intervention and organization of urban space is used. This has guided practices and reflections in the field of urbanism for at least two centuries: «The whole range of reformist practices affirms the coincidence between the territory and the community that occupies it: to organize one thing is to order the other; to think of one is to think of the other » (Lepetit, 2001:75-78)<sup>11</sup>.

In dealing with large cities, especially those in Latin America and Brazil, the transformations experienced in the last four or five decades have been investigated, described and analyzed by the most diverse fields of urban studies. However, among architects and *urbanists*, these general explanations of “the city and its crisis” seem to prevail, their projections almost always being anchored on “inaccessible totalities from an empirical point of view - the ‘big city’, the ‘global urban’, the ‘metropolis’, ‘de-territorialized urbanization’ (Cordeiro and Frugoli, 2011:19)<sup>12</sup> and,

10 A reflection in this sense was developed by one of the authors in Rosa (2014).

11 Since at least the 19th century, redefining notions of the constituent elements of urban order and social discipline have been constructed by interventions that articulate *urban order* and *social order*, due to the perception that the former would result in the latter.

12 On avoiding such “inaccessible totalities,” the epistemological endeavor is derived, however, from not slipping into a fragmentary perspective, of the city as a “mosaic,” or reduced to “localisms,” as Smith (2002) warns. There is still a whole fundamental reflection on how such a totalizing notion of “city”

above all, dichotomous approaches founded on categories such as 'informality', 'illegality' or 'anomie'. These continue to face the various socio-spatial dynamics and non-hegemonic territorialities exclusively by using the key ideas of 'absence', of 'lack' and legitimizing interventions and violence of all kinds. In contrast, the city that emerges from empirical research, ethnographic approaches and didactic experiments based on what we reflect on here, presents itself as a potent field of transits, mediations and disputes in which different temporalities, spatiality and social universes are articulated - not without conflicts<sup>13</sup>.

Such methodological - and, above all, epistemological - experiences seek to understand the complexity and power of contemporary cities, with special attention being given to the project of inequalities in Brazilian urban space. This is in addition to re-examining dichotomies and self-explanatory categories (such as segregation or exclusion) and from the perspective of there being socio-spatial dynamics in constant movement, thereby producing and disputing the city at its margins and, therefore, continually shifting them. The intention is not to affirm by saying this that there are no socio-spatial boundaries by which to delineate the territories, the processes and the urban experiences in question. Rather, we propose that reflection be engaged on in terms of the notion of "threshold." (Agier, 2009; Telles, 2013)<sup>14</sup>. Thresholds suggest relationships, passages, transitions - notions which pertain to the orders of space, but also of time. It is from this perspective that Walter Benjamin proposes a strict differentiation between frontier and threshold: more than to contain and maintain, to delimit and separate (as the frontier

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was constructed from a Eurocentric referential, which does not correspond to the multiple reality of the urban facts in today's world, and thus a cultural decentralizing of urban studies is necessary, as Agier (2017) indicates.

13 Although the trajectories of practical-professional, research and didactic work of the authors are distinct, there is a clear approximation in these terms of the empirical and experimental dimension and of the interdisciplinary and liminal studies (especially with respect to history and anthropology), which converges to a joint activity in the research group Laboratório Urbano. As to how some examples of this unfolded, see, for example, Jacques (2001), Rosa (2014), or the various studies produced within the scope of the Laboratório Urbano ([www.laboratoriourbano.ufba.br](http://www.laboratoriourbano.ufba.br)).

14 The reflection on the notion of "margins" and "thresholds" has been developed by one of the authors (see Rosa et al, 2017; Rosa, 2018) in a research project entitled *Liminal urbanities: housing and socio-spatial dynamics on the margins of the city*.



does), a threshold is said to be defined as a transition zone, which is not strictly defined, and which refers to flows and counter flows, indeterminate places and times and indefinite extent, «a betwixt and between, a gray zone that smelts categories and mixes oppositions» (Rizek, 2012). They lie between the possibility of an open future - “transition zones” - and the managerial down-trodding of life - “detention zones”.

Arantes (2000), reflecting on contemporary Brazilian cities, proposes the notion of “threshold zones”: social places conformed by a diversity of categories and social subjects, territorialities and sociability that overlap and intertwine in a complex way, not only in space, but also in time. These zones are said to result from time-space references, «produced in the conflicts and sociability called marginal». Alternatively, in the words of Ribeiro (2010) the creation of “unstable territorialities” in (or above) excluding urban policies and their materiality in the city, which are associated with the emergence of relations and tensions between different rationalities, norms and territorialities in contemporary cities.

From this perspective, an epistemological inversion is proposed in the sense of deconstructing (or at least adding tension to) the totalizing and functionalist paradigm that still guides, to a great extent, the practice and teaching of urbanism and, above all, urban projects in Brazil: to regard the city as a “category of social practice” (Roncayolo, 1978; Lepetit, 2001) by taking into account the existence of different “regimes of urbanity”, which would require, in critical and propositional terms, attention being given to the “multiple ways of” making a city (Paquot, 2006; Agier, 2009). Going beyond paying attention to everyday life (as proposed by authors as distinct as Henri Lefebvre or Michel de Certeau, and which is also presented here as a kind of methodological and epistemological premise), this is mainly about an operation, which at one and the same time is analytical and political. The aim is to invoke, recognize - and to learn to dialogue with - the presence and action of “the many others” in the city, to use a well-known expression coined by Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro. This is about a proposition that puts at the center of the teaching (and professional practice) of urbanism the relationship with the practitioners of the city, their experiences, the other rationalities and normativities in relation to the hegemonic models, the dynamics of self-production and self-management, and, above all, the disputes they bring about.

Having said that, would it be possible to think in terms of “liminal urbanities”, without dealing with the qualitatively other, only as a target of intervention? How can we overcome the difficulties historically placed in the field of urbanism in order to apprehend, understand and narrate these thresholds (spaces-times-bodies) in the constitution of the urban? To what extent can such questions be addressed in the teaching of urbanism, thus outlining - perhaps - the possibility of shaping an urbanism that is also liminal?

It is in this sense that a kind of methodological and epistemological decentering (or denaturalization) becomes necessary, thus seeking other ways of understanding and working. This need arises from this complexity inherent in contemporary cities and their “thresholds”, thereby grasping them as a fertile base (which, in our view, is inescapable) for the teaching and practice of urbanism in Brazil<sup>15</sup>.

### **Deviant methods: process and experimentation**

We know that the tools, instruments and methods linked to the project, especially in urbanism, are no longer (or have never been?) sufficient to understand the complexity of contemporary cities and, in particular, of our Brazilian cities, which are still so segregated and unequal. We have long needed, especially in national cases such as those of ordinary people occupying land, of favelas and of other self-constructed spaces (but also in the vast territories of “social interest” which the state has semi-produced), to invent, to create and to explore new methodologies, new tools, and to exchange with other disciplinary fields. We need to do this in order to be able to think of the project as a more complex, collective process, and not only as the result of one author, of a great demiurge architect of the “star system”. These authors are mostly men, white and from rich countries, who have produced huge monumental and spectacular works, made to be shown in glossy photographs, usually with no inhabitants, in international magazines.

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<sup>15</sup> Margareth da Silva Pereira, a lecturer at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, in an interview with the *Revista de História* (2010, our translate), states that in Brazil, “we accumulated the wisdom of the between 500 years ago.” Taking this approach seriously is one of the methodological and epistemological propositions that we have been undertaking from the idea of “threshold”: what wisdom is this? How can we make the dialogue with “technical”, “academic” and “professional” knowledge? How can we learn and teach other dimensions of urbanism from this “between”, from these “thresholds”?

More interesting than looking for a single “new” methodology to be applied and replicated – thereby setting experiments or other procedures in a plaster cast, or worse, creating models or recipes – would be for us to work in order to broaden the field of knowledge of architecture and urbanism and start thinking about the project in its “widened field”, based also on its disciplinary thresholds. Perhaps the most interesting path of learning to follow (“met-hodos”, a path that one follows) is precisely to multiply the possible pathways, to make them tensor with each other, based on methodological experiences that always deviate, errant, which do not know, *a priori*, where they will arrive. The perspective of thinking about the project as an open process that operates within a widened field, and of thinking about the process in a free and plural way, can indicate to us a denser understanding of the complexity of contemporary cities. This understanding arises from the dissensions and the permanent tensions, which consider and recognize the conflicts and various disputes of forces in the disciplinary field and in the city itself.

We question the model which is deeply rooted in project teaching that this would be the “solution” to be achieved for certain previously “diagnosed” problems (again, this is about an approach inherited from that hegemonic modernity, which is still oriented by a notion of development associated with the idea of progress), usually proposed by teachers, for which it would be enough to mobilize certain skills and technical knowledge and synthesize them in the language of drawing (technical drawing, in particular). Without disregarding the importance of such technical training, we have attested in practice to its insufficiency for dealing with this complexity, with these “liminal zones”, with the various “regimes of urbanity”, and with the socio-spatial realities (and disputes) of Brazilian cities: this is about proposing other perspectives of formation – that are critical and reflexive, thereby invoking the “craft of thinking” as a priority dimension that is complementary to all others, among the many possibilities that are laid out such as “craftwork” in architecture and urbanism. Moreover, arising from the project teaching and, thus, to seek other thresholds, between disciplinary fields and forms of approaching the urban, by regarding the project as the students’ autonomous and dialogic investigation and experimentation.

Autonomy in the didactic construction and, above all, in learning is therefore, in this case, a kind of methodological presupposition,

which crosses the various experiences carried out by the authors in different moments and situations, but which characterize a perspective of collective work of the research group *Laboratório Urbano* (PPG-AU/ FAUFBA), mainly by articulating teaching-research-extramural. The methodologies proposed are possible (but not predetermined) paths for the trajectory of learning: contrary to the understanding of project as the (final, finished) product - a methodological target at which to aim -, the pathways through the experimental methodologies proposed, in particular in the Atelier 5 of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the Federal University of Bahia<sup>16</sup>. These vary each year according to the themes or territories to be worked on, and also in step with the internal dialogical construction of the teams of teachers and graduate students at the university teacher stage, and with the very class of students. These pathways are also variable depending on the choices made by each work group, in direct relation to the city and with its most diverse practitioners: that is, they are woven in uncertainty, in incompleteness, and into the process itself.

They are woven, above all, into the learning of collective, dialogical and collaborative (and, why not say, often conflicting) work from which this teaching proposal is structured: the exercise of the debate of ideas, dialogue in dissent, of the collective exposure of troubling issues and discoveries are a fundamental part of this process. These are based on the counterpoint to the notion of individual authorship, on the relational dimension of the practice of project and on the perspective of the social and interdisciplinary activity of the urbanist architect. More than a construction in which teachers delimit scopes and stages of finite exercises in themselves, it is about a process of mutual exchanges and learning (between teachers and students, between students and the city, but especially among teachers, students and the interlocutors/ inhabitants/ and users) that are established throughout the procedural course of investigation in which the project is constituted.

The hustle-bustle of the city, its inhabitants and their practices of self-production and self-management of everyday space and life

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16 Atelier 5, at FAUFBA, can be considered the only moment, during the undergraduate course in architecture and urbanism, in which the projective teaching of urbanism is realized. There are different groups of Atelier 5, with different approaches, which, in fact, is officially entitled "urban and regional planning".

(de Certeau, 1980) has been one of the fundamental elements of this experimental and deviant construction. Walks, meanderings, strolls, diverse displacements, ethnographic approaches, urban insistences, interlocutions with residents-users-practitioners, participant observation, active listening, interactive games and workshops, and picking up fragments and memories, to mention some of the most diverse field methodologies worked on these experimentations. In dialogue with other disciplinary fields, but also with other groups and teachers of the disciplinary field that have been creating and experimenting with methodologies worldwide<sup>17</sup>, there have already been several forms of students' corporal approach to the city, and to the territories to be worked on in reflective-propositional exercises. This is about an approach which, more than being focused solely on the technical formation of "urbanists" (which we also do not steal from ourselves, even though account must be taken of the limitations of class hours to be set aside, on most architecture and urbanism courses in Brazil, in the field of urbanism<sup>18</sup>). What is proposed is to instigate the critical - and propositional - apprehension of contemporary cities as an indispensable formation (considering the inseparability between the production of architecture and the production of the city) even for those architects who do not intend to be active professionally only on the urban scale, as urbanists *stricto sensu*<sup>19</sup>.

The very delimitation of the territorial cut-offs to be worked on by the groups sets out from this embodied interaction with the city, without the prior definition of a technically established "polygonal" (which creates limits), being technically established (almost always

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17 For example, some of the national and international partners of the Laboratório Urbano, such as the Laboratoire Architecture Anthropologie - LAA and LIEU network (ENSA - Paris La Villette), Center de Recherche sur l'espace sonore et l'environnement urbain CRESSON and AMBIANCES network (ENSA - Grenoble), Laboratorio Arti Civiche - LAC (Roma Tre), or, also, the Laboratório de Estudos Urbanos - LEU (FAU-UFRJ) and the LEAUC (IAU-USP), which only cites a few of these.

18 Figueiredo *et al* (2013).

19 And here we get close to the reflection proposed by Pallamin (2009, emphasis added): «As you see, much of the architects' craft, of what they do (or do not do), and the disposition with which they do it is based on the the understanding that they have on the '*construction of the city*', and on the socio-political terms of this construction: what is destroyed, is excluded, is eliminated or is exalted in it. To situate oneself critically in this field is among the most pressing tasks for the present exercise of architecture, if it is taken as something more than the mere positive affirmation of the state of how things are».

randomly from the point of view of the uses of the city and creating or reinforcing boundaries, limits and spatial segregations): they are established from the dynamics of apprehension and synthesis, and vary their modes of establishment and their scales according to the territories, issues, situations and dialogues worked on. The investigative outcomes are therefore territorialized, situated and still use cross-references and tensions between the histories, data, policies and official legislation and the narrated stories, memories and processes of self-production and appropriation of the spaces in question, as well as their normativities and documental sources. This thus brings up, as a fundamental element for critical reflection and proposition, the dimension of the various rationalities (and their operative dimensions, when applied) and urban temporalities (and the various future projects that are intrinsic therein, the raw working material of urbanists ever since the discipline began).

As a fundamental part of this mutual learning of the project as an open process, the dimension of synthesis and communicability - transmission, translation, narrative (as opposed to the idea of representation *stricto sensu*) is also the result of questioning, investigation and invention. What is decisive is the question of narration, and what we call urban narratives as a form of transmitting experiences and urban apprehensions, and thus of causing tension and dispute between macro- and micro-narratives in relation to the production of territorialities and urban subjectivities. The project itself, in this procedural sense, can be understood as narrative<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, the continuous exercise of producing transient syntheses (graphic, textual, imagistic narratives in varied scales and dimensions) throughout the various stages of methodological experimentation that conform the teaching and the learning in this Atelier 5 of FAUFBA, more than fixing a reality (or a "diagnosis" on it), end up not only transmitting or translating what was learned, but also create, manufacture, and create other times and spaces,

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth going back to the idea of "narrative urbanism", which has been theoretically and empirically constructed by Adriana Goni, an associate professor of urban studies and planning at the Universidad de La Republica de Uruguay, according to a lecture recently given at FAUFBA, at the invitation of the Laboratório Urbano, entitled *Beyond borders: narrative urbanism, art and architecture*. Also Sandercock (2005) reflects on the relationship between narrated stories and urban planning (also as a narrative), thereby problematizing some of its methodological dimensions.

thereby delineating at each stage the propositional outcomes. They are configured as the learning of « a balancing act in which the circumstance (place and time) and the speaker him/herself take part, a way of knowing, manipulating, arranging and 'putting' a so-called moving of a set» (de Certeau, 1980). Starting with the articulation, overlapping and rearrangement of these accumulated transient syntheses, several cartographic (including the corpographic) dimensions are explored, thereby relating the various layers of apprehensions, narratives, bodily experiences, images, territorialities, temporalities, data, policies, histories or memories of urban experiences, and thus seeking to make other possibilities of understanding and proposition for the territories, the city and the very practice of urbanism.

We propose, in this context of urbanism and urban project teaching as a field of experimentation, to take up again the idea of montage as a method of knowledge that was carried out by modern thinkers, as presented previously: a type of urban montage<sup>21</sup> that does not set out from ideas already given, of ready-made nexuses, simply to legitimize them. On the contrary, what is sought is to find possible nexuses not yet known during the practice itself (exercise or game) of the montage (process of montage/ dismontage/ remontage), because it acts from the differences, without seeking any kind of unity or totality. This type of montage attempts to separate what is normally collected and to connect what is usually separated, and, thus, ends up dismantling the more functionalist and simplifying but also the more formalist and purist forms of thinking about the very notion of project and the very disciplinary field of urbanism - a kind of dismontage of certainties, naturalizations, and widely settled simplisms. A dismantling, also, of functionalism and formalism, of the forms of thinking still inherited, as has already been said but bears repeating, from a modern positivist and teleological tradition.

Once the project is viewed, as proposed, as an open process that aggregates a multiplicity of momentary, polyphonic configurations, there would be no possibility of any final, fixed unitary synthesis,

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21 On the issue of urban montage proposed here, in particular, from Walter Benjamin, Georges Bataille and Aby Warburg, see the text *Urban Montage* in volume 4 of the collection «Methodological Experiences for Apprehending the Contemporary City» (Jacques, 2015), the introductory text of the research study «Contemporary Urbanism: nebulae, montages and gestures» (awarded a PQ1 / CNPq scholarship).

that is, a rigid and doctrinal methodology. The methodologies, in the plural, would always be provisional and ephemeral, deviant and errant. Another type of knowledge is possible by renouncing a single methodology, from recognizing that in order to contemplate a multiple “object” - such as the complexity of cities - we must accept the impossibility of a single method, and explore methodological and theoretical multiplicity. This is a more complex form of seeing, composing, assembling, thinking, proposing, and dismantling any kind of unity, any kind of fixed, sedentary or sedimented certainty, and remounting a multitude of other forms of apprehension and other ways of understanding complexity that can lead to other forms of conception, project, and intervention.

It is certain that this experimental and procedural character, which has some of its mottos in its deviations and uncertainties, is built under risks and difficulties (of which there many) and, above all, is characterized by a certain uncertainty and also anguish (not only among students, but also among teachers). Add to this the fact that “slow thinking”, the longer, slower temporality of the processes of apprehension/ reflection/ narration/ proposition and the construction of the necessary links to dialogue in alterity (approximation to territories and their daily goings-on, exchanges between local and popular knowledge, practitioners’ and academic knowledge) contrasts sharply with the time of the “permanent urgencies” of Brazilian cities. There are also concerns about the disciplinary thresholds, since interdisciplinarity, besides power, also has its limits, and is not an unrestricted practice, as Lepetit (2001) teaches. These are, however, questions, the reflexivity of which is built into didactic practice (which is always articulated to the research dimension). Another occasion is needed for looking at these in greater depth as to do so here would go beyond the limits of this text. It is worth saying, for now, that dealing with such risks, difficulties and anguishes is part of what we consider to be an important form of learning in order to be active vis-à-vis the complexities of contemporary cities and their “liminal zones”.<sup>22</sup> So that we think of the urbanism and urban project in a more complex and broader way, i.e., as it is a form of knowledge production, cultural creation, social transformation and also of critical and political action, it will be necessary to exercise more and

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<sup>22</sup> We are inspired by the propositions of Jeanne Marie Gagnebin (2006) and Cibele Rizek (2012), both in dialogue with Walter Benjamin’s writes.



more new experiences, full of uncertainties and unpredictability. Exploratory research in an architecture and urbanism project or the experimental process of project as a research process, as knowledge production, is fundamental to underpinning a less simplistic teaching of project in architecture and urbanism courses, so that future urbanist architects do not use project as a simple uncritical tool to try to solve old problems, problems that have already been formulated. Instead, and to the contrary, they should enable students to think about project critically, as an instrument that is able to problematize new questions, to create other possibilities, new tools and instruments, to formulate new methodologies, and also to build other bases for new demands that have not yet been thought about as well as to create innovative public policies.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, a more in-depth discussion of the policy dimension of the project itself as an instrument of power would be necessary,

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23 Despite being a subject that has not yet been sufficiently explored, some studies have already contributed to show the importance of the processual project as a research in the field of architecture and urbanism and, in particular, the co-implication between research and project teaching (and here we cite only two, by way of example: Reyes, 2015; Cellamare, 2011). More recently, we can also see there has been a significant increase in initiatives (no longer at the cutting edge as in the past) that promote the important bringing together of project research and university extra-mural activity - such as the experiences gathered in the publication organized by UCL Urban Lab around the project *Cities and Methodologies* (Campkin; Duijzings, 2016), or those promoted by the various groups mentioned in the note 20 above, many of them presented in editions of REDOBRA ([www.redobra.ufba.br](http://www.redobra.ufba.br)). In Brazil, this has been done by creating or consolidating both public offices (or model offices - the EMAUs) in several of our schools of architecture and urbanism and also by the new residences in technical assistance in architecture and urbanism and other instigating initiatives (highlighting the experience of the AU+E Residence in the FAUFBA itself, or the Ateliers "Ensaio Urbanos", promoted by the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo), such as the so-called "insurgent" or "conflictual" urban projects and plans, which lead to the discussion about the project for university extra-mural work (such as the experiences of the "Planos de Bairro" promoted by the Lugar Comum group, also from FAUFBA, among others). This not only makes it possible for our schools, especially public-sector ones, to fulfill their social role (which is also political) in a fuller way, but also to open up new interesting perspectives, often with interdisciplinary teams of teachers and students, for experimentation and innovation in project methodologies, in particular in the so-called collective or participative projects or even those of social interest. Reflective deployments and a greater publicity of these experiences and their processes become more and more fundamental, such as the recently books edited in Brazil: Bienestein *et al* (2017) and Oliveira *et al.* (2016), to name but a few of them.

particularly in the case of urban projects, which are always inseparable from public policies. However, this will remain to be done on a future occasion given the limits of this brief text. To instrumentalize, to provide more theoretical and, above all, methodological support for research in project and its more experimental exercise, should also be seen as a critical proposal to destabilize some more consolidated forms of thinking and intervening in contemporary cities. We must not forget that the theory and methodology of projects, as well as the discussion about teaching projects, are also critical and necessarily political actions. There is still a lot to do for our cities in Brazil – since their spaces, especially the public ones, are involved in permanent and sometimes violent disputes – and project as a process, which is at the same time, reflexive, critical and propositional and is an important instrument in the field of knowledge of architecture and urbanism.

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